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Delineates problems likely to be encountered by a staff or faculty member assigned by the president of a small college to conduct a space utilization survey. Offers concrete suggestions and valuable reference sources. Sets forth pitfalls to be avoided and emphasizes problems of interpretation of collected data.

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XIV. Space Utilization Surveys in Small Institutions

. . . . . John B. Morris

For several years the expression, "the impending tidal wave of students," has been firmly entrenched in the vernacular of higher education. The "wave" has been considered rather autistically by most educators; but as it continues to take on characteristics of reality, we find frantic activity taking place aimed at preparing ourselves to accommodate the students. Much of this activity is concerned with physical facilities and takes the form of space surveys closely followed by building programs. These building programs are announced in the newspapers as being designed to meet the projected needs of the college as revealed by a careful survey of existing facilities. Often experts or consultants are quoted in describing present conditions and to justify the announced expansion.

The presidents of our smaller institutions are no less aware of the necessity of having objective data on which to base their decisions than are their counterparts in the large universities. However, the cost of securing consultant firms or experts to conduct comprehensive space surveys is sometimes prohibitive.

In an attempt to lessen the costs to his institution, the president in many instances selects from among his own staff or faculty an individual and informs him that he has been chosen as the chief space analyst for the institution. It is to those of you who find yourselves in this unenviable position, or have the suspicion that you may soon do so, that these remarks are addressed.

While I certainly do not pretend to the status of expert in the field of space studies, I do believe that some of the experiences I have had at several institutions have allowed me to gain some conception of the difficulties that one may expect to encounter. Accordingly, what follows represents the advice that I would give to anyone who finds himself responsible for a space utilization survey in any size institution; but I shall pay special attention to some of the difficulties peculiar to smaller institutions.

The first step is to secure a definite statement from the head of your institution that will identify the purpose of the survey. A survey that is not designed to answer some specific question or that does not yield evidence to aid in solving an existing problem may be of interest when it is completed, but its utility will certainly be

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low. Surveys that are not designed to answer specific questions often lead to what I call the "President's Circle." This circle is usually generated when a mass of data is presented to a chief executive who has ordered a survey without a clear purpose in mind. The usual procedure is to peruse the data, indicate slight disappointment at the space utilization rate and to suggest that the study be repeated again the following year so that comparisons can be made. As studies of this sort usually do not produce any administrative action that will produce any changes in utilization rate, the following year's study usually elicits about the same comment and by the third year the President's Circle has been well formed and the study will be done "because we usually do one every year." Presidents often boast that their institutions conduct a complete space survey each year without realizing the full implication of their remarks.

After a statement of the purpose of the survey has been received (assuming you have been successful in getting one; a somewhat tenuous assumption), for your further protection, I would suggest that you reach an agreement with your president as to the kind of information that will be accepted as an answer to the question or as an aid in the solution of the stated problem.

An insistence on your part that these two conditions be met before embarking on a survey will save you trouble in many instances and will help prevent the frustration of seeing data resulting from much hard work go unused. I might add that application of the above suggestions will at times get you excused from conducting the survey. Some presidents after thinking through these questions decide that a survey is not really needed.

Before beginning the actual survey there is one other step that should be taken that will pay large dividends in saving time and effort. You should secure from your Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, Physical Plant Director, or similar person, current and accurate scale drawings of each building that is to be included in the survey. Each room of the building plans should have its dimensions clearly marked and the square footage computed.

I would advise you to beware of the superintendent who has partitions in his brain. By this I mean you will often find the only existing plans to be out of date and they will not properly reflect many of the minor structural changes that have been accomplished within the last few years. Don't accept plans that are "about right except for a partition we put in about here a couple of years ago." You will find that you have enough to do without having to become a draftsman during the survey.

Incidentally, you will find one of the most effective ways of presenting your results makes use of the building plans. Color codes showing the utilization rates of rooms, etc., can be easily worked out and entered on the plans. Thus, at a glance one can get a visual image

of the relative efficiency with which each room or building is being utilized.

One other time-saver should be mentioned that will greatly facilitate your survey. Be certain to secure keys to all rooms that are to be included in the study. This point is especially important if faculty offices are among the rooms being studied.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of all the foregoing preliminary steps as aids in securing a picture of the scope of the work to be done and as time-savers.

The next step is the actual survey. For the purposes of this discussion I shall assume that the focus of the survey you are to undertake is classroom utilization. Indeed, this is the facet in which most interest is shown at the present time; but I hope you will remember that if the main purpose of the survey is to plan for expansion the total plant must be studied. As many surveys that have their genesis in classroom utilization grow into total institutional studies, I believe it is worthwhile to select your data gathering forms with this possibility in mind. Much time and effort will be saved if the data gathered in initial classroom studies is comparable to subsequent data gathered for other aspects of the campus and can be combined with them computationally.

In order to secure the foregoing advantages and to make use of past experiences of others, I would suggest that you carefully consider forms similar to those recommended by Russell and Doi in their Manual for Studies of Space Utilization in Colleges and Universities. The definitions used in this manual have become virtually the standard and the forms suggested by the collection and analysis of data are so clearly presented and explained that no one should experience difficulty in their use.

Even so, I believe you will find it worthwhile to try out the particular form you intend to use to gather data on some of your own rooms before any large scale duplication is made. Should you find they are entirely suitable, and they will be in most cases, you may start your survey with confidence. In the event that you find some modification or redefinition necessary, I would suggest that you think through the effect your change will make. Your decision to make even slight modifications should be evaluated on the basis of how well you will be able to analyze the data after it has been secured. Data, no matter how accurately compiled, that does not lend itself to meaningful analysis is useless.

If you are thoroughly satisfied that your form is acceptable, you may consider yourself ready for the survey to begin. However, you are still subject to several pitfalls that can complicate your work and incur the wrath of various faculty members.

Not the least of these difficulties will arise when you go about the business of classifying the type of room. In addition to stating the principal use of the room, one should attempt to classify it as "general purpose" (e.g., a lecture hall) or as "special purpose" (e.g. a physics lab).

It may appear obvious to you that the typical lecture room is a general purpose room and that a chemistry laboratory is a special purpose room, but woe unto the space surveyor who, without consulting the department, classifies the lecture room controlled by the Philosophy Department as a general purpose classroom. When this event occurs, you are likely to have it pointed out that the small bust of Aristotle located in the back corner of the room really signifies that this is the Philosophy laboratory and as unsuited for general purpose classification as the history room down the hall that has a map depicting Hannibal's conquests.

As a simple measure of protection, I suggest that in surveying each room you make an attempt to do so with the assistance of its principal user. In this manner you may prevent embarrassing mistakes and are not as likely to overlook specific deficiencies that the room may have. In cases in which you honestly believe the room should be properly classified as general purpose despite objections, a note to that effect can be made and the problem resolved by the administration. Lest you believe my examples to be too extreme, let me caution you to wait until you have conducted your own survey and had its results accepted before you classify them as humorous.

While the goal may be to classify all rooms in the two aforementioned categories, there is one problem that is almost peculiar to the small college that requires that a third classification be recognized. This classification, which in my own work I designate as "restricted," is made necessary by the antiquated professor of classics who has for the past forty years used the room next to his office. Typically, this is one of the more attractive rooms on the campus and contains at least forty student stations. The fact that he seldom has over four students in his advanced classes and that the utilization rate is extremely low is of no consequence; no administration dares move him out. The only hope of the space controller is that this man will accept soon his retirement that is already three years overdue. The classification, "restricted," is used to designate certain hours that this room is not available for assignment regardless of the fact that it could be more efficiently used. This category could also be called "non-assignable, general purpose space."

After you have gathered the basic data and subjected it to the usual analysis (again I would suggest that the Russell-Doi forms be closely followed), you will find yourself faced with the problem of interpretation. This problem will be compounded by the fact that you must so interpret the findings that their true nature will be immediately apparent to the naive viewer. The fact that the figures are

completely clear to you cannot be used as an effective criterion as you have knowledge based upon their derivation that will not be easily communicated to your president or other official to whom you make your report. Always bear in mind the finality with which most people accept statements that are accompanied by numbers.

A technique that will greatly aid you in selecting the proper summary figures, particularly those dealing with measures of central tendency, is to make frequency distributions of your results. If you will make these distributions and inspect them carefully before deciding whether to use the mean, median, or mode as a summary figure, you are much less likely to present results that contain distortions and lead to erroneous conclusions.

Should you feel that you lack the proper technical training to make this selection, I would suggest that you consult with your mathematics department or one of your social science groups. The manner in which you present your results will have an influence on the kinds of interpretations that can be legitimately made. Make every effort to be certain that your figures properly reflect the actual conditions that obtain.

The interpretations that are to be made will be largely a function of the original purpose of the study. Thus, the importance of securing a clear statement of the purpose and the specific questions to be answered is reiterated. If the main focus of the study is on more efficient utilization of existing space, I believe that in small institutions you will discover that it is not lack of sufficient space that is the main problem but the lack of proper scheduling.

By proper scheduling I am referring to room period usage rather than percentage of student station utilization. Often space data is used in a "combinational and permutational fallacy." By this I mean that the only improvements made in scheduling are those designed to secure a larger percentage of student station untilization in each room to which a particular class may be assigned. The total number of room periods available in an academic week is not increased, but the apparent efficiency is increased by placing the ten-student class in a twenty-student-station room and the twenty-student class in the thirty-place room formerly occupied by the smaller class.

On paper this kind of maneuver brings about improvement, but it does not solve any space problems. Additional usable space can only be "created" by rescheduling classes and making greater usage of the afternoons. I believe that in most of your colleges if you would give me control of your English Department, I could produce 20 per cent more space for you. Actually, I have used English only as an example--any other department having a similar number of required courses would work as well.

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If one of the charges given for your survey is to plan for new buildings, you will have many things to take into consideration in drawing conclusions from your data. For example, the problem of what size rooms should be constructed in the new building will have to take more into consideration than the average or most popular size class revealed by your survey. Of equal importance will be the particular educational philosophy to be subscribed to in the future regarding the size of instructional unit and the financial outlook of the institution. None of your interpretations and/or recommendations will arise as easily as I have stated here, but I did want to mention some of the factors that are often overlooked.

I hope that I have not been discouraging. Time has not permitted anything approaching a full discussion of a "do it yourself" survey. All I have attempted to do is to mention a few pointers that should be of aid in preventing difficulties that others have had.

I'll close with one further point. You must be prepared to accept part of the responsibility for actions that are taken or the lack of action that follows space surveys. It is impossible to conduct a good survey without the knowledge of your faculty. They will expect to see action result from the study, and the focus of their requests will usually be the space surveyor. Good luck!